



Interview Summary: Councilors Catherine McKenney and Mathieu Fleury, City of Ottawa

Background

Catherine McKenney has been Councillor for the Somerset Ward since 2014. Mathieu Fleury has been Councillor for the Rideau-Vanier Ward since 2010. These wards were two of the most impacted by the Convoy-related demonstrations in Ottawa in January and February 2022.

During the demonstrations, Councillors McKenney and Fleury witnessed firsthand the impact of the protest on Ottawa residents and businesses. Councillor Fleury attended daily meetings with impacted Business Improvement areas (BIAs) and other stakeholders. Councillor McKenney walked through the protest areas regularly. Both Councillors received hundreds of emails and calls from concerned residents.

Councillors McKenney and Fleury were interviewed by Natalia Rodriguez, Jean-Simon Schoenholz, and Guillaume Sirois on September 8, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Jean-Simon Schoenholz.

Pre-Arrival

In the days leading to the Convoy's arrival in Ottawa, concerned residents and businesses were sharing their concerns about the Convoy and its anticipated arrival with Councillors McKenney and Fleury. They were sharing social media posts about the Convoy's plans, its opposition to public health measures, and its intention to disrupt the City. There was also information on social media about the group's racist and anti-Semitic elements. Three days before the Convoy's arrival, Councillor McKenney published a statement asking the Convoy not to come if their stated intention was to disrupt the City.

Councillor Fleury forwarded all information to the authorities for awareness and action.

City Councillors were invited to the Ottawa Police Services Board (**OPSB**) Special Meeting on January 26, 2022 to ask questions to OPS command about the Convoy and its anticipated arrival in Ottawa. In Councillor Fleury's opinion, the OPS was not providing sufficient information in response to the questions asked by City Councillors. For instance, they did not sufficiently explain why truckers would not have to respect Ottawa's designated truck routes, which was concerning for Councillor Fleury.

Councillor Fleury explained that prior to the Convoy's arrival, he as well as businesses and other residents were getting very little information on the risks for residents and businesses from OPS and City officials and, as a result, were ill-informed on the situation. Councillor McKenney added that the OPS did not explain why they allowed the trucks into



the City. Residents were surprised and disappointed in this decision, and particularly in the decision to let the trucks park on Queen Elizabeth Driveway, close to residential areas.

Arrival – Information Gathering

Councillors McKenney and Fleury did not visit the protest area during the first weekend of the demonstration but started visiting more regularly during the first week. During the second and third weeks, they were on the ground at the protest almost every day. Notably, Councillor McKenney spent a full day informing protesters that they had an opportunity to leave the protest so as to not be included as defendants in a class action lawsuit initiated by residents against the protesters (the **Zexi Li Lawsuit**). On the last Wednesday of the demonstrations, Councillor McKenney attended part of the City Council meeting remotely from one of the protest areas in order to show Council and the public what was going on.

On January 29, 2022, the Rideau Centre had to close because of a large number of protesters entering and loitering in the premises without respecting public health measures. Following this closure, Councillor Fleury organized a meeting with certain affected stakeholders on January 31, 2022 and then began leading daily meetings with stakeholders affected by the demonstrations in Ottawa more broadly, including affected BIAs, hotel associations, Ottawa Tourism, City of Ottawa Emergency Management, By-law Services, City Economic Development, OC Transpo, police officers, as well as government and elected officials from all three levels of government (councillors, MPs and MPPs). In addition to Councillor Fleury, Councillor McKenney attended a couple of meetings, and Councillor King attended a number of them. During these daily calls, participants discussed the City's actions, and shared information that was not publicly available. The Mayor, the City Manager and the Chief of OPS sometimes sent representatives to these meetings, but they did not attend. Kim Ayotte, the City's General Manager of Emergency Services, was invited to the meetings and generally attended.

Impact on Residents during the Convoy

Excessive Noise

According to Councillor McKenney, protesters were using their trucks' air horns and train horns almost constantly, day and night. This was in addition to other sources of noise, such as fireworks. Councillor McKenney explained that the noise caused by the protesters was overwhelming and traumatizing for the residents living in the neighbourhoods adjacent to the protest areas. Councillor McKenney added that residents could not sleep, and some suffered hearing issues during and after the demonstrations.

In Councillor McKenney's view, this excessive noise was all directly related to the protesters. Although other disturbances caused by the Convoy continued until the departure of the protesters, the constant honking abated when the injunction granted in the Zexi Li Lawsuit came into force. It was replaced by other noise, however. Residents began using all channels, including counter protests, to demand action and a resolution to the situation for their own safety and well-being. Councillor Fleury added that residents



and businesses began to feel abandoned by OPS and authorities. Councillor McKenney stressed that anyone that could leave the affected area did so because the conditions created by the Convoy were so unbearable. Some residents were too afraid to leave their homes, and Councillor McKenney facilitated some residents' departures in coordination with OPS or their family members.

Physical Violence or Threats

Councillors Fleury and McKenney did not witness any physical violence from protesters associated with the Convoy. Councillor McKenney was sometimes confronted when visiting the protest areas. They felt most in danger while walking home through residential areas of downtown Ottawa. During these walks, Councillor McKenney encountered people that were threatening to them. Councillor McKenney described these people as not belonging to the core Convoy group, but as sympathetic to the extremist ideology that had come to the City to cause trouble.

Councillor McKenney had personal knowledge an altercation at the Bronson and Somerset intersection where a 70 year old female resident was punched in the face by a protester. Councillor McKenney also heard of another incident where someone was accosted on the LRT for wearing a mask and suffered a broken nose in the altercation.

Councillor Fleury's home address was posted online without his consent. As a result, a group of protesters drove in a pickup truck to Councillor Fleury's home and attempted to intimidate him. He and his family had to relocate until the protests subsided. Councillor Fleury reported the situation to the OPS, but he never heard back from them. Councillor Fleury's wife, a Chinese Canadian, was the subject on online threats and abuse.

Councillor Fleury also heard of the physical assault of a client of the Shepherds of Good Hope shelter in his Ward by persons believed to be associated with the protest as well as physical altercations at the LRT Rideau station between residents and persons believed to be associated with the protest.

Harassment

Councillor McKenney received hundreds of emails every day from residents and businesses reporting incidents related to the protest. In some emails, residents complained of protesters harassing residents, including workers such as grocery store clerks, for wearing masks. Councillor McKenney received information about residents afraid of leaving their homes because of the protesters' harassing behaviour. Councillor McKenney was also forced to relocate their 14 year old daughter because of direct threats made against them, that included their home address.

According to Councillors McKenney and Fleury, numerous businesses and institutions in the area had to close because of the protests, including the Rideau Centre, the Rideau Library branch, the University of Ottawa, and federal institutions. Most businesses on Rideau Street and in the By-Ward Market were closed during the protests. Councillor



Fleury explained that groups of protesters would demand to dine indoors at numerous local restaurants in violation of public health measures at the time. These businesses had to choose whether to close entirely, whether to confront the protesters and ask them to leave or whether to serve them in violation of public health regulations. Many chose to close.

General Disorder

Councillors McKenney and Fleury witnessed open fires and tanks of fuel being delivered to protesters close to residential and business areas. Councillor McKenney witnessed this situation on Kent St. and Bank St. while Councillor Fleury witnessed this on George St. and at the intersection of Rideau and Sussex. According to Councillor Fleury, the protesters installed a DJ booth and a BBQ at this intersection. He added that there was almost a constant flow of protesters bringing fuel to that area from Nicholas St., in front of the Shaw Centre.

Councillors McKenney and Fleury witnessed protesters driving trucks unsafely (for example, large trucks driving on residential roads, driving in the wrong direction on one-way streets, and not respecting stop signs). They did not witness protesters using their trucks to threaten or attack pedestrians. In the By-Ward market, pick-up trucks parked anywhere and everywhere without consequence (tickets or towing), including on sidewalks on Rideau Street near The Bay entrance.

Symbols of Hatred

Councillors McKenney and Fleury saw the trucks themselves as the most threatening symbol of the demonstrations. They explained that the trucks, and the encampments built around them, were a sign of a takeover, lawlessness, and chaos for the residents of Ottawa.

According to Councillor McKenney, people with masks, women, seniors, and people with disabilities were more targeted and threatened by the protesters. Councillor Fleury added that the racialized community felt targeted and was seeing the lack of enforcement around the protest as a reflection of white privilege.

During the protest, Councillor McKenney was forwarding complaints from residents to Minister Mendicino, Mayor Watson, Chief Sloly, Chair Deans of the Ottawa Police Services Board and other officials, but did not receive any response to these emails. Councillor Deans did call them regularly throughout the occupation. Councillor Fleury added that his office was receiving close to 200 emails per day from residents frustrated by the protest. They both agreed that this far exceeds the volume of complaints they would normally receive.



Attempted Arson

On or around February 8, 2022, there was an attempted arson in the lobby of one building in Councillor McKenney's ward. According to Councillor McKenney, shortly after the event, the perpetrators were circling the building in trucks with flags related to the Convoy. In Councillor McKenney's view, there is little doubt that the perpetrators were sympathetic to the Convoy movement and that the chaos created by the Convoy enabled these extremists to come to the City and act with impunity.

City and Police Response

According to Councillors McKenney and Fleury, as the protest dragged on, residents were increasingly feeling abandoned by the City and the police because of the lack of enforcement, communication, and tools to help businesses and residents cope with the situation. As a result, residents developed a pronounced lack of trust in the City and OPS and started taking matters in their own hands. According to Councillor Fleury, this situation also diminished the appeal of living downtown for many residents.

Councillor Fleury noted that before the City's declaration of emergency on February 6, 2022, there was no official recognition that the protest had evolved into an occupation of the City. He also noted that the response was police-led. Because the OPS was in command, the City did not take charge of the response and lead with by-law enforcement, among other things.

Councillors McKenney and Fleury explained that the protesters were gathering outside and in periphery of the main protest area, without any apparent intervention from the City or law enforcement. Councillor Fleury understands that By-law had been told not to enforce, even outside the red zone for any parking or other by-law violations relating to the use of vehicles that appeared to be related to the protest. One of the peripheral protest areas was the Rideau and Sussex intersection. According to Councillor Fleury, reopening this intersection would have had an important positive impact on the businesses nearby, such as enabling them to access deliveries.

According to Councillors McKenney and Fleury, the police's focus was in the area close to Parliament Hill (where the main protest was happening) but there were serious issues at many other places in Ottawa, including residential neighbourhoods. This is why Councillor McKenney brought a motion asking for the RCMP to "to assume responsibility for public safety and security within the Parliamentary Precinct", which would allow OPS



to ensure the safety of residents living in the surrounding residential areas.¹ This motion was passed by City Council, but Chief Sloly pushed back on the idea².

Councillor Fleury explained that the City refused to respond to residents' complaints about trucks in residential areas and redirected all these complaints to the OPS. The OPS rarely responded to the residents' complaints. Councillor Fleury added that the City by-law and regulatory service (**BLRS**) had the tools and the willingness to enforce by-laws in residential areas but were directed by the OPS not to enforce. On February 15, 2022, Councillor Fleury raised a concern to BLRS with respect to a fuel truck parked in one of Rideau Centre's underground parking lot.³ Instead of immediately towing the vehicle, as would normally be the case, the truck stayed in the parking lot for 36 hours before leaving.

According to Councillors McKenney and Fleury, the police operation to end the occupation had numerous positive impacts on residents and businesses, such as the reopening of the LRT and Rideau Centre the next day. Councillor McKenney had asked whether residents should shelter in place for the duration of the police operation, but they were told by OPS that there was no need. Councillor Fleury added that residents felt relieved immediately, although deep wounds and trauma remained.

[Actions by Residents](#)

On February 4, 2022, Councillor McKenney and approximately 30 residents organized a "safety walk", with the purpose of reappropriating the streets for themselves. They stayed in the residential neighbourhoods and did not go directly into the red zone. Councillor McKenney organized a second walk a few days later, but it was called off because they perceived a heightened risk of confrontation with protesters.

On February 12, 2022, residents and businesses from the Glebe area organised a second walk to show their opposition to the Convoy occupation of Ottawa. The organizers and participants followed Councillor McKenney's request to not come into Centertown to prevent altercations with Convoy protesters. The walk went north on Bank St. until reaching Centretown, at which time the participants turned around and walked back to the Glebe.

On February 15, 2022, a group of residents organized a demonstration in the Billings Bridge area to prevent a convoy of truckers from joining the Convoy-related demonstrations in the downtown core. Councillor McKenney attended the event later in the day and saw hundreds of people peacefully preventing the trucks from passing the

¹ OTT00006610.0001, p. 11

² OTT00005837.0001 and OTT00004844.0001

³ OTT00008284.0001



bridge. According to Councillor McKenney, there were no altercations between the two groups. The protesters associated with the Convoy were shocked that the residents did not want them in the City. OPS officers were at the event, but they were not actively involved.

Eventually an agreement was reached: the protesters removed the flags supporting the Convoy from their vehicles and were allowed to leave one at a time. All the members of the convoy complied and one by one they turned around and left.

According to Councillors McKenney and Fleury, the Billings Bridge event was a watershed moment. It demonstrated that residents were able to take action and that they were not going to stand idly by. According to Councillor Fleury, the community felt empowered and wanted to take more actions against the protesters as a result of this event.

There was also a counterdemonstration in front of Confederation Park but neither Councillor was involved in that. Councillors McKenney and Fleury are not aware of any other counter-demonstration efforts.

The OPS and Chair Deans of the OPSB asked Councillors McKenney and Fleury multiple times to not organize or encourage counter-demonstrations as this was draining police resources. When Councillor McKenney could, they worked with organizers to mitigate the impact of the walks and counter-demonstrations, but there was a limit to their influence over the residents.

Economic Impact and Aftermath

Councillors Fleury and McKenney do not have specific information on business or wage losses as a result of the Convoy. Councillor Fleury mentioned that 1,500 Rideau Centre employees were temporarily laid off as a result of the mall's 25-day closure. The Rideau Centre is in Councillor Fleury's ward. He added that the *Winterlude* cancellations (Ottawa's winter festival that occurs annually in February) resulted in significant revenue losses for businesses.

Councillor McKenney is aware of at least one business that had to close because of the cumulative impact of the pandemic and the Convoy-related protest. Councillors McKenney and Fleury do not have information on how the financial assistance offered by the federal government was used by businesses.

According to Councillor McKenney, for weeks after the protests, residents continued to be afraid, and some would burst into tears when talking to them about the events. Councillor Fleury added that residents were afraid that the Convoy protesters would return to reoccupy the City. Although residents are used to protests since the City is the nation's capital, the Convoy protest was nothing like they had ever seen. Typically, protesters are on foot and limit their impacts to the targeted public institutions. During normal protests, the impact on residents and businesses is minimal or non-existent.



Councillors McKenney and Fleury also described the residents' prolonged loss of trust in the City and law enforcement, primarily due to a lack of enforcement and clear action. Residents would like to know, for example, why the City did not seek an injunction sooner.

Councillors McKenney and Fleury were in favor of the federal government's invocation of the *Emergencies Act*. Councillor McKenney explained that, although the situation was difficult on the weekdays, it was significantly worse during the weekends and it was getting even worse every weekend. On the day before the invocation of the *Emergencies Act*, Councillor McKenney was very afraid of the upcoming weekend and was thankful for anything that could help bring an end to the protest.